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NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

I AM NAVY MEDICINE

BY VJOHNSON – MAY 1, 2014
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A Few Words from a Navy Nurse

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We don't always get to choose our career, sometimes it chooses us. When I started out as a brand new Navy nurse, I just knew I'd be working in operating rooms and assisting with cardiothoracic surgeries. I never imagined that I would end up dedicating my professional life to psychiatric and mental health care. But one of the best things about Navy Medicine is that there are so many opportunities to explore different paths in health; that sometimes you stumble upon a path that takes you exactly to where you were meant to be.

My nursing career with the Navy began at Naval Hospital Rota, Spain. I had accompanied my husband on an overseas assignment and, with my two-year nursing degree, had found a civil service job at the naval hospital working as a credentialing coordinator. I met five wonderful Navy nurses in Rota who forever changed my life. Due to their encouragement, support, and mentorship, I was accepted into a nurse completion program and my Navy Medicine journey began.

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My first duty station was Naval Medical Center San Diego and my plan, at the time, was to gain experience, fulfill my commitment to the Navy, and return to civilian life.

I was initially assigned to the directorate for surgical services working on an inpatient surgical subspecialty ward, but I really wanted to work in cardiology, part of the directorate for medical services. I jumped at the first opportunity to transfer to the medical directorate, reasoning that this would put me one step closer to my dream job in cardiology and it would just be a matter of time before I could transfer. As fate would have it, that opening was in the acute inpatient mental health unit.

One of the first lessons I learned as a Navy nurse was that if you do something well, people are going to want to keep you. Like clockwork, every six months I requested to be transferred to cardiology. Each time, my request was denied. However, with every “no,” I was given more responsibility within the mental health unit. The third time I was denied a transfer, I was offered yet another task to create the nursing path on a pilot team for the unit’s consultation liaison services. The great thing about the Navy is that you have the opportunity to do jobs that you never knew you wanted.

What I discovered in that mental health unit was that I have a passion for caring for psychiatric and mental health patients. This is a field in which you really get to know your patients because mental health is concerned with how an individual thinks and feels. Over the years, I have worked with patients ranging from family members with chronic mental health illnesses to service members returning from deployment with acute psychological injuries. I have seen patients with severe depression and catatonia recover to the point where they can talk, smile, and interact with others again. The power of mental health care is that when appropriate and compassionate treatment is provided by a qualified professional, patients can and do get better. For many, they are essentially getting their lives back. I can’t imagine a more rewarding career.

After seven years, I was inspired to further my nursing education and was picked up for the Duty Under Instruction (DUINS) Program and received my master’s degree in psychiatric-mental health nursing, clinical nurse specialist. As such, I have expanded my nursing knowledge and the ability to impart this to junior psych nurses, something that has only deepened my dedication to this field that chose me. In addition to the opportunity to take my nursing career to the next level, the Navy has given me the opportunity to be a leader.

Since October 2011, I have had the privilege of serving as the Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Specialty Leader for the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED). As the specialty leader, I am in a unique position to help move my community forward by being a voice for my colleagues and driving policies that make sense for our patients as well as other mental health clinicians. I can also really support my community by providing education, advocacy, and mentorship at the deckplate. With 106 people to mentor, it keeps me very busy, but it also gives me an opportunity to see firsthand the impact a leader can have. I have been able to provide career guidance to those in my community and have had the privilege of working with military nurse specialty leaders from other services on a national joint initiative to support wellness for service members and their families.

Being part of a team and something bigger than yourself is another aspect of serving in the Navy that I have truly enjoyed. As the deputy director for the Naval Center for Combat & Operational (NCCOSC) I am excited to be part of an organization that is leading the way in promoting psychological health, operational and occupational stress control, and resilience in our Sailors and Marines. After over a decade of war, many of our service members have had their mental health pushed to the limits. The work we do at NCCOSC – facilitating research to

gain a deeper understanding of mental health disorders like PTSD, evaluating treatment programs, and developing tools to build resilience – is so important to Navy Medicine’s commitment to caring for Sailors and Marines and supporting mission readiness, and I’m proud to be a part of keeping that promise.

When I joined the Navy, I thought I knew what to expect, but, after eighteen years of service, my experience as a Navy Nurse Corps officer has far exceeded my expectations. I expected to travel the world and gain nursing experience. Thanks to the Navy, I have lived and worked everywhere from Europe to Asia, the West Coast to the East, and Afghanistan, experiencing places in America and around the world that I wouldn’t have otherwise. As a Navy nurse, I’ve worked in mental health, education, pediatrics, surgery, inpatient wards, outpatient clinics, and administration, having the opportunity to find not just a career, but a lifelong passion for helping those with mental health injuries and illnesses. I can honestly say that serving in the Navy has given me a broader range of experiences, personally and professionally, than I would ever have known as a civilian nurse.

My name is Jean Fisak and I Am Navy Medicine.



About vjohnson

- *Chrystal Morris*

You are truly an inspiration. I am a retired civilian RN and life has no do-overs, so I can't start over again. Have you considered being a PR spokesperson for Navy nurses on college campuses? Just a thought. May God bless you and yours and keep you safe.